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Extinction Rebellion (XR) have risen from nothing to global movement in record pace, pushing environmentalism to the forefront of the public's mind and demanding action from governments. In this, they have achieved some success.

As well as vague declarations of a "climate emergency" by local councils and public bodies, the UK government has been forced to accept the findings of the Committee on Climate Change's report and set a target of net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

The report was commissioned before XR started, but perhaps XR's most visible success is the fact that when then Chancellor Phillip Hammond started to brief against this report he was opposed by others within his party.

The climate skeptics and those who suggest a transition would hurt the economy too much were silenced by XR's actions on the streets and the weight of public opinion.

Within this movement, I've been inspired by the actions of many individuals who have worked to promote environmentalism as more than a fringe issue: the parents who formed a climate change play date group to educate kids and other parents; the trade unionists pushing for a just transition for workers.

Behind these actions has been a core XR organizing team operating in a "holocracy", an organizational structure in which groups are able to self-organize but are still directed by a central circle. This structure attempts to increase autonomy for individual groups whilst maintaining a hierarchical decision-making structure.

Holding on to this hierarchy, whilst speeding decision-making, also brings about the emergence of leaders who inevitably will be far from perfect.

The leadership of XR are committed to nonviolence. More than this, they have convinced many others of this method by frequent quoting of statistics which prove nonviolence to be correct and all other forms of struggle to be counterproductive.

These impressive figures stem from academic papers read by their leadership which have become the touchstone of the movement. Sadly, although presented as scientific, this is a classic case of confirmation bias.

We have all done this: the problem is solved, the solution is found and the search begins to find papers and studies that agree. XR's method of organizing rests on the assertion that nonviolent protest is more effective than struggles adopting a diversity of tactics. To back this up they point to a study that clearly shows this — and, even better, with data!

This is where a social scientist is supposed to critically engage with a text, to understand the flaws in a methodology and basically to read the whole paper rather than just looking at the figures. Sadly, this has not happened and instead a whole group of people has been convinced by a half-read paper which has been debunked many times.

In this study from 2008 by Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth, which XR quote for proof, a "nonviolent" protest movement is defined as one in which fewer than 1,000 people were killed. Let that sink in. I could go out tomorrow and murder 999 people in the name of any given cause and this study would still classify me as a nonviolent protester.

Glib hypotheticals aside, this has led to some serious rewriting of history by XR. They frequently claim to draw inspiration from nonviolent movements such as the suffragettes. Let us be clear: the suffragettes were arsonists. They undertook a bombing campaign. They learned martial arts to fight the police. They were not nonviolent, they used a diversity of tactics and to claim otherwise is damaging to the collective memory of struggle.

This misreading of history is something which seems to happen regularly with XR as they also claim to draw inspiration from the anti-apartheid movement which they say was nonviolent. I imagine this will come as a surprise to the families of the thousands of people who died during that armed struggle.

Furthermore, the paper that is frequently referenced by XR clearly states that it does not include campaigns such as the civil rights movement because it looks specifically at regime change or ending foreign occupations and not "social and economic campaigns."

Unless I have misread the objectives of XR, it does not advocate regime change and so falls into this category. It seems odd to generalize the results of a study that states that it specifically does not apply to your movement's objectives, unless of course you are searching for data to justify the opinion you always held.

Sadly, the quoting of statistics from this paper adds an air of scientific rigor to XR's claims which has convinced a lot of people of their validity. These statistics are treated as gospel despite the paper acknowledging that their dataset on nonviolent campaigns is biased towards success because campaigns crushed through repression in their infancy are not reported.

This is not to say we should be advocating for violent insurrection, we just need to keep to one of XR's core demands: tell the truth. Some campaigns have been won by peaceful means alone but most, including the civil rights movement in the USA and Indian independence, were achieved through a diversity of tactics having been adopted.

I for one am unwilling to condemn activists who do adopt violent methods, just as the suffragettes did, in defending the environment, particularly when environmental activists are being murdered at record rates around the globe.

Although XR's model is based on the PhD research of one of its founders, Roger Hallam, it seems he never completed it because he managed to convince so many people of his findings before he finished, despite the shaky foundations of his research.

We do know, however, that before founding XR he was involved in organizing a student rent strike at University College London as well as an occupation at the London School of Economics in support of their cleaning staff. I have spoken to people involved in both of these campaigns.

During the actions Hallam convinced often teenage co-organizers to take actions that he wanted to include as part of his PhD research without informing them this was part of his motivation. He even went as far as lying to co-organizers about having consulted the cleaners the campaign was acting on the behalf of.

The result? Hallam was asked to leave both campaigns, although this did not stop him claiming to have led them when he ran for MEP or in his sales pitch for consultancy work.

Claiming collective victories as your own, particularly when you were asked to leave the campaign, perhaps speaks to a broader willingness in XR's leadership to push their own narratives above anything else. The decisions have been made and we know we are right — who cares if the statistics are dodgy or the cleaners have not actually been consulted?

As a result, XR is trying to deal with some key contradictions — what if, like the civil rights movement, the police do not turn out to be our friends and instead are used to repress us? How do we continue selling a narrative to new recruits when claims about the suffragettes and anti-apartheid movement are so easily debunked? In a holocracy, how do those on the periphery change the structure or move on if they no longer want to follow directions from the core group?

This is not intended as a personal attack on the XR leadership, who, by setting their research out in public and expecting us to act on it, must anticipate it being critiqued.

XR have achieved a lot and should be thanked for their efforts, but we cannot allow flawed leaders, flawed theories of change and false historical narratives to dominate.

This is instead a call to those in the environmental movement who want to continue our varied history of struggle, acknowledging what has and has not worked in an honest fashion instead of abiding by dogmas passed on to us by a leadership we have no say in picking.

Struggles are varied and messy. Now is the time to embrace action on all fronts, not demand others stick to our moral assertions in order to receive our solidarity.